Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Brown Thornbill - photo by Peter Turner

President's Report 2018

I thought I might save some effort by recycling my first Presidential report from 1982 but it seems that it was not preserved for posterity by being printed in the newsletter. No matter, let's try a later one, 1988. Same result. On then to 1998, still no report in the newsletter. However on poring over these old newsletters some interesting things came to light which I had more or less forgotten. For instance the attendance roll for the first meeting was included, names mostly forgotten now even by older members. 22 people attended that meeting called by Ray Bradfield with the aim of starting a Field Naturalists Club in Castlemaine, but one person forgot to sign the book – Ray Bradfield. Other names included Ern Perkins, Rita Mills, George Broadway and John Bradfield. Another signature was Don Walker, interesting because Don's granddaughter was one of the 2018 recipients of the award which the club makes to students. Geraldine and Geoff Harris attended and joined at the first general meeting. There are two couples remaining of the first year, The Harris's and the Broadways.

There are many items of interest to be found going through all the newsletters which are now available on line to anyone, thanks to Chris Timewell. The only one I will mention is that I was reminded that in the early years we had up to 15 members on the committee. We used to meet in Kaye Turner's large lounge room which was capacious enough to hold us all. The committee is now much smaller which is perhaps just as well as we now have to squeeze into my small dining area. Unfortunately Nigel decided to retire after serving his term as President but who can blame him for not wanting to come all the way from Sutton Grange in the depths of Winter. Fortunately Nigel has been replaced by two excellent ladies, Di Thomson and Sue Albert.

Once again I must thank, on my behalf and yours, the members of our committee. I have looked enviously at the long lists of committee members of other clubs and of the various roles which they perform. In our case all roles are performed by a very few willing members but there are other possible tasks which could be undertaken by others.

I have been considerably impressed by the capable way Peter Turner has carried

out the role of Secretary. His efficient organization ensures that meetings run smoothly and any business is dealt with promptly.

What a treasure is Noel. Every month he manages to produce a high-class newsletter, often with little to work with. Noel welcomes any contribution made by members, whether it be reports on guest speakers talks, field trips, photographs, or articles of interest. Please keep Noel in mind when you see a possibility of contributing an article, no matter how small, it will be greatly appreciated. When I was Newsletter Editor there were a number of members who contributed items regularly, which was of great assistance to me. Certain members reported regularly from Sandon, Campbells Creek and Specimen Gully. I am pleased to note that Nigel is now reporting from Sutton Grange on a regular basis. (When he is not away twitching in some other part of the world).

The club finances are in the very capable hands of Geoff Harris with his accounting background. You will note that the club account is again in surplus. Thanks Geoff.

I must not forget Geraldine who has taken on the supper responsibility and not only brings the supper essentials but usually produces a delicious cake which encourages members to linger after the formal part of the meeting to chat among themselves and with the guest speaker. I was also reminded that in the early days two different members were rostered on each month to do the supper which was considered a very important part of the evening. Di, Sue and Richard make up the rest of the committee and their contribution is invaluable. Richard is now a resident of Sunshine and has to make the trip up once a month to attend. Who can blame him for missing the occasional meeting, especially in the depths of Winter. Thanks to you all.

When driving towards Newstead it is a pleasure to observe that the roadside is generally neat and tidy which is not always the case with other roads leading out of town. I suspect that a large number of travellers reach that part of their route and decide that it is time to discard their fast food containers, bottles, packets etc. It is Geoff who organizes the cleanups so it the credit is due to him and to all those members who turn up to assist. It is another case of many hands make light work. A good roll-up means that the job is completed by mid-morning, time for a coffee.

I decided to not list all the events of this past year which you already know, except to say that somehow the committee has again managed to come up with a variety of knowledgeable and interesting speakers. These included David Hollands and Carol Hall who have each favoured us with a talk on more than one occasion.

It was however not such a good year for field trips as the weather was not very kind. Flowers were in short supply and so was water in the swamps for the birds. Nevertheless we did have some interesting outings and there is always something of interest wherever we go. Once again I would like to see more members attending field trips although this year the numbers have picked up, which makes for a more social and enjoyable atmosphere.

I was unable to participate in the Annual Bird Count last year, but fortunately I was not missed as a good number of observers turned out for the occasion, bolstered this year by several members of the newly formed Bird Observers Club, which also includes a number of our members. This resulted in a pleasingly large number of species being recorded. The Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests are performing

an invaluable role in monitoring possible threats to our forests and educating the public, and it is pleasing that a number of our members are affiliated with both organisations.

One of the highlights of this year past was the launch of the Local Wattles book. This had been suggested by Ern at the launch of the Eucalypt book and it was decided that it would be fitting to carry out his wish. Due to health reasons I was unable to contribute this time, but I was considerably honoured by being asked to perform the launch. We wanted to include some of Ern's pictures, but most the photos were taken by Bernard Slattery and Bronwyn Silver, who I am sure you will agree have done a fine job.

It is usually with pleasure that we find a plant specimen previously unrecorded on our list, but not when it turns out to be something like Chilean Needlegrass. Margaret Panter is leading the troops in the war against this pest, and several members have assisted Margaret in the struggle in which some progress is being made. Nevertheless constant vigilance will be required and we should all familiarize ourselves with this pest so that any occurrence can be quickly identified and dealt with.

And so we look forward to SEANA Spring 2019 when SEANA returns to Castlemaine for the first time since 1998. Some forward planning has already taken place by the sub-committee formed to manage the project. The Campbells Creek Community Centre has been booked as the centre of activities. Notable speakers have been booked for the Friday and Saturday nights and catering arrangements are being finalized. It is hoped that all our members will attend the evening meals planned on the Friday and Saturday and will fraternize with the visiting members of other clubs. As is usual at these events, a series of outings/tours will be offered to our visitors which will we hope highlight the attractions of Castlemaine. We will need leaders for all these outings so please set aside that weekend, the first weekend in October, (unfortunately the AFL Grand Final weekend), and to seriously consider whether you can offer to lead an outing. It is essential that some members step forward, otherwise we will be in trouble. We will have a list of possible outings so I suggest that you choose one (or more than one) and check it out beforehand. On the other hand you may know of a place which would be of interest to visitors, We envisage that most excursions would be of half-day duration, with the possibility of a repeat depending on the demand. This enables visitors to attend two excursions which might otherwise clash.

I have now had several stints as President and my two years is up. Since its inception we have had 12 different presidents, all having served more than one term. I offer my best wishes and support to the incoming committee and look forward to an exciting year.

George Broadway

A reminder

1. that **membership fees** for 2019-20 are due

2. **Castlemaine Naturalist Newsletter**

Deadline for articles for the May edition is by close of Friday 26th April

Travels in Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda

Peter Turner

Nigel and Ann Harland visited parks in Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda in April last year with a nature tour company, and presented a selection of wonderful photographs of birds and animals on March 8th, following the AGM. It rained on many days, but as Nigel noted, they had to stay safely within the vehicle, so most of his photos were taken from this "hide". Starting in Arusha, Tanzania, the clouds cleared from the summit of a snowy Mt Kilimanjaro to provide a stunning opening image. Did we know that there are 5 subspecies of giraffe? And that elephants have right of way on the roads?

The tour included Serengeti National Park and Ngorongoro Conservation Area World Heritage site in Tanzania, and ended in Rwanda with two very contrasting highlights. They visited a museum dedicated to the dreadful period of genocide, which was deeply affecting. Climbing up incredibly steep tracks in the hope of an encounter with the Mountain Gorilla was seriously challenging, but Ann and Nigel were rewarded by amazing views of several gorillas, including a silver-backed male. The tightly controlled arrangements for small groups to view these wonderful primates are designed to minimise disturbance. And while many of us have seen photographs of Africa's mammals, Nigel's images of the startling variety of bird life were eye-opening. Thank you, Ann and Nigel.

List of species observed:

Mammals		Bird species	
Giraffe	African Buffalo	Nubian Woodpecker	Scarlet-chested sunbird
Elephant	Gerenuk (Antelope)	Lilac-breasted roller	Kori Bustard
Spotted Hyena	Common Warthog	Red & Yellow Barbet	Little Bee-eater
Leopard	Grants Gazelle	Hammerkop	Common Buzzard
Lion	Oryx	Fischer's Lovebird	Purple Grenadier
Vervet Monkey	Cheetah	Crowned Crane	
Wildebeest	Mountain Gorilla	Vulturine Guinea Fowl	
Plains Zebra		Yellow-billed Stork	

Our guest speaker for April is Euan Moore on
"Tracking Boom and Bust - Bird Surveys around Innamincka."

Since 2011 members of the Friends of Innamincka Reserves have been conducting bird surveys on an almost annual basis in the Innamincka Regional Reserve. During that time we have seen the boom years following the floods from Cyclone Yasi to the intense drought of recent years as well as the impacts of grazing, mining, tourism and weed infestation. The deserts in this area are harsh but beautiful. Permanent waterholes along Cooper Ck provide a drought refuge for wildlife and in the years after flood the Coongie Lakes are magical.

SEANA Autumn 2019 Meeting in Port Fairy

Peter Turner

Over 50 members from 13 Field Naturalist Clubs (FNCs) gathered at Port Fairy on Friday March 22nd for the Autumn meeting of South East Australian Naturalists Association (SEANA). This was not a standard SEANA camp, with multiple excursions over the weekend, because none of the 21 FNCs that make up SEANA were prepared to host a full program this autumn. Instead, the SEANA Management Committee organised an informal weekend, with the Annual General Meeting, a meal and a guest speaker on the Saturday evening.

Judy and Phil Hopley joined Rosemary and me as Castlemaine's representatives, meeting up with most of the group for a meal at the Victoria Hotel on Friday night. SEANA President Phil Rayment (Latrobe Valley FNC) welcomed us, and distributed maps and information about where to see the natural history of the Port Fair region. Many of us signed up to join the Hamilton FNC excursion that Diane Luhr had arranged to Griffiths Island, on Saturday morning. Others chose walks along the beach where Hooded Plovers have been threatened by race horses; around Tower Hill; Childers Cove, The Crags and Yambuk Lakes, or the Indigenous Protected Area at Tyrendarra (which we visited on the Sunday morning before returning home – highly recommended).

We've walked around Griffiths Island many times, but had not investigated the inter-tidal rockpools; Diane explained how diverse the life forms are, after warning against putting fingers under rocks in case a blue-ringed octopus might be lurking….. we saw a variety of sea-weeds and molluscs, a few crabs, anenomes, and a few tiny fish. Over 25 bird species were seen, including White-throated Needletails, Sooty Oystercatchers, Kelp Gull, Gannet, a Pied Cormorant, Ruddy Turnstones and hundreds of Crested Terns. A small brown bird darting in and out of a prickly bush eluded identification, until later analysis of photos revealed a juvenile Eastern Spinebill.

At the general meeting following the AGM, I provided preliminary information about SEANA in Castlemaine in October, and we heard that the Hamilton FNC will host the Autumn Camp from 17-19th April 2020. The next ANN (Australian Naturalists Network) meeting will be hosted by the Stanthorpe FNC in southern Queensland at the end of September 2020. During a discussion about declining insect populations, we were encouraged to watch the SWIFFT (State Wide Integrated Fauna and Flora Teams) seminars, which cover many natural history topics (http://www.swifft.net.au).

After the dinner, the guest speaker was Port Fairy resident Jodie Honan, who has volunteered with South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group to protect remaining wetlands in Port Fairy that are heavily used by Latham's Snipe. Jodie spoke about the long battles with developers and governments, the formation of the Lathams Snipe Project (https://lathamssnipeproject.wordpress.com) and the research in Australia and Japan to understand this threatened species. An inspiring presentation – have a look at the website.

The Birds of Sutton Grange

Nigel Harland

Back to the normal number of birds. One thing of note is the absence of any predators.

Superb Fairywren	Red-browned Finch	White-browned Scrubwren
Australian Magpie	Australian Raven	Laughing Kookaburra
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Long-billed Corella
Crimson Rosella	Striated Pardalote	Grey Shrikethrush
Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike	Tree Martin	New Holland Honeyeater
Welcome Swallow	Red-rumped Parrot	Red Wattlebird
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Common Bronzewing	House Sparrow
Grey Currawaong	White-throated Treecreeper	White-winged Chough
Little Raven	Galah	

Observations

At the March meeting, Peter Turner reported on absence of Powerful Owls from CBG over recent weeks, but Jenny Rolland and Euan Moore recorded a pair on 26th Feb. Peter requested that any observations of the owls be reported to him, because BirdLife Castlemaine District is considering a monitoring program for Powerful Owls in our region. Since then on 21st March the pair were photographed by Peter in the same tree. [right]

Birds of a feather – need water.

Several members have commented on seeing small mixed flocks of birds visiting water baths in home gardens in these dry times, but the half hour show outside our kitchen window on 20th March, starting at 7:10 pm, was particularly special. We enjoy visits by many of these species most days, but rarely as many over such a short period. We counted:

3 Crimson Rosella
2 Yellow-faced Honeyeater
3 Striated Thornbill
5 Superb Fairy-wren
2 Weebill
1 Grey Shrike-thrush
2 New Holland Honeyeater
1 White-browed Scrubwren
1 Red-browed Finch
5 Eastern Spinebill
2 Yellow Thornbill
3 Silvereye

- Rosemary and Peter Turner

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri April 12 Meeting: speaker EUAN MOORE - Bird Surveys around Innamincka (see page 5)

Sat April 13 field trip: Significant trees in the CBG

Fri May 10 Meeting: speaker CHRIS TZAROS on Turquoise Parrots

Sat May 11 field trip: TBA

Mon May 13 – Roadside cleanup

Fri June 14 Meeting: speaker ALISON POULIOT on Fungi

Sat June 15 field trip: Fungi in Wombat Forest with Gayle Osborne

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2019
Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2019 Committee

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